

Two Poets of the Peasantry

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Let the Heliconian Muses first be sung,
Mistresses of the great and holy Hill
Of Helicon, where with their delicate feet
They dance about the violet-shadowed spring
And the high altar of great Cronion.
With beauty new-bathed in Termessus*
fountain,
Or Hippocrene, or Olmeios adored,
Round topmost Helicon they drew their
dancing-
Lovely, entrancing, the lilt of their rushing feet:
Then, mantled with the mist, they took their
way
Across the midnight. Sweet their voices rang,
Of Cronus, the Aegis-wielder, and Hera
singing-
Queen Hera, Lady of Argos, shod with gold,
And the Aegis-wielder's child, grey-eyed Athene;
Of Phoebus Apollo and arrowy Artemis,
Poseidon, earth-embracer and earth-shaker,
Grave Themis, and Aphrodite dancing-eyed,
And Hebe golden-crowned, and fair Dione;
Of Dawn, and the mighty Sun, and bright
Selene,
Leto, lapetus, Cronus crooked in counsel.
Earth, and vast Ocean, and black-manded
Night,
And the rest of the sacred race of the Undying.
Fair was the song they once taught Hesiod
Feeding his flock on holy Helicon;
Thus to me then the goddesses began,
Daughters of Zeus, the Muses of Olympus:
'Shepherds of the upland, names of shame,
mere bellies,
Many a lie¹² our lips like truth can utter,
But true things, too, at will our tongues can
tell.'
Thus spoke the daughters of God, the true of
tongue,
And gathered for my staff a branch of laurel,
With leaf that does not die, a far-seen sign.

¹²An allusion to the heroic or romantic epic like *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as contrasted with Hesiod's own didactic epic. For this sense of rivalry between the two, cf. the legend that Homer and Hesiod contended at Chalcis and Hesiod was crowned victor, on the strangely modern ground that the songs of peace are better than those of war.